

STRATEGIC PLANNING FRAMEWORK

IM△GINE
CANADA



2021 FALL UPDATES

OPENING

Imagine Canada's Strategic Planning Framework began serving as the organization's strategic guidance in January 2016.

A lot has happened since then! As such, we continue to ask ourselves how we can best support organizations in the nonprofit sector and offer leadership on critical issues.

From the dramatic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in 2020, to greater acknowledgment within the mainstream of the existence and effects of systemic racism, to the challenges faced by the sector in light of the WE Charity controversy, Imagine Canada's Board of Directors concluded that a review was needed. 2021 marks the midway point in the projected lifespan of the original 2016 Strategic Planning Framework, so this was also a natural time to review its continued relevance.

The Board of Directors reviewed the document and concluded that the plan's architecture, major themes, and four Strategic Directions still provided needed long-term guidance for the organization. That being said, there were a number of areas that would benefit from some updated thinking:

- Additions to the environmental scanning portions
- Continued evolution of the Strategic Directions
- A complete rewrite of the "Engage Our Influencers" Strategic Direction

This document will address these and other updates.

We continue to be truly grateful for the support of our members, donors, sponsors, volunteers, clients, accredited organizations, subscribers and staff who provide the foundation for our work to continue – from participating in network conversations to financial support.



Ronan Ryan, Chair,
Board of Directors



Bruce MacDonald,
President & CEO

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Imagine Canada's staff, operations, work, and network depend on traditional Indigenous territories to provide us physical space, sustenance, safety, and community to work, live, and play.

Our physical head office is located on the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinabeg, the Haudenosaunee, the Chippewa, and the Huron-Wendat (Wyandot). We acknowledge that these lands are covered by [Treaty 13](#) and the [Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant](#). We acknowledge that these lands are still home to many diverse First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people.

We acknowledge that our ability to live and work on these lands today is a direct benefit of policies of expulsion and assimilation of Indigenous peoples during the time of settlement and Confederation, and since. The harms of these policies are many and are still being felt in Indigenous communities today. We express gratitude towards the Indigenous peoples who have and will continue to steward these lands. We commit to amplifying the voices of Indigenous peoples and working against the everyday forces of white supremacy and colonialism present in the nonprofit sector.

Our team is actively engaging in training and education related to reconciliation and decolonization. We aim to listen, learn, establish meaningful relationships with our Indigenous sector colleagues, engage in courageous conversations, and take actions that advance reconciliation in the nonprofit sector.

Our work at Imagine Canada is long-term and multi-generational in nature, and we recognize that it will be a continuous and intentional process to build strong relationships with our land, and with Indigenous communities.

As part of our ongoing learning, we welcome your questions, comments, and feedback about our land acknowledgment. We would also love to hear about your reconciliation and decolonization journey. Please share your stories, learnings, and resources with us at info@imaginecanada.ca.



A CHANGING WORLD

Like most strategic planning documents, the 2016 [Strategic Planning Framework \(SPF\)](#) noted a number of factors shaping and influencing the operating environment in which charities, nonprofits and social entrepreneurs function. These included:

- The aging of the population
- The impact of immigration
- The contribution of Indigenous peoples
- Emerging weaknesses in charitable giving
- The changing nature of volunteerism

These continue to be relevant and important considerations. A component of the updating process was an examination of additional factors that have emerged since the initial SPF was approved and Imagine Canada's Board of Directors have noted a number of other key societal trends.

Anti-racism is at the forefront of our nation

Propelled centre stage by Black Lives Matter in 2020, issues related to systemic racism have started to be taken note of in many areas of Canadian society. For the nonprofit sector, an examination is underway for many aspects of its work – program operations, board governance and Staff composition to name but a few. We believe that this work is at an early stage and will continue to shape efforts of sector organizations for many years to come.

Indigenous Reconciliation will continue to gain momentum

While the 94 Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission were released in 2015, in 2021 access to safe drinking water remains a problem on many reserves, unresolved land claims galvanize the Land Back movement, and the discovery of mass, unmarked graves of children at the sites of former residential schools shocked many settlers. We see a future where greater efforts are made to further the Calls to Action and create a climate of true reconciliation.

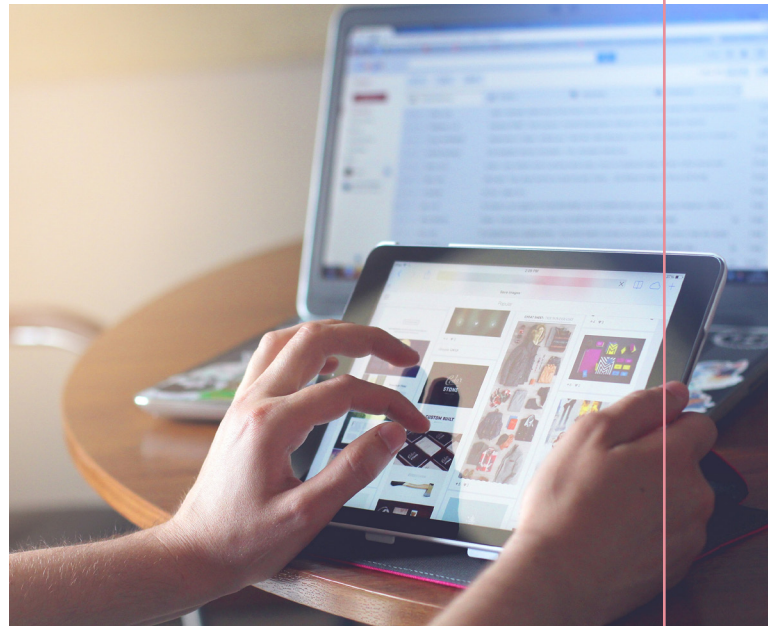
Climate emergency will impact all aspects of our daily lives and sector organizations alike

We are living in a time of dramatic change. We are witnessing the impact of loss of sea ice, accelerated sea level rise, and longer, more intense heat waves. Our daily lives are already being affected by climate change as we cope with stronger, more powerful storms, forest fires, flooding etc. Organizations in the sector will be asked to respond to the impact of climate change, from advocating for better environmental regulations to providing service to climate refugees.



Digital transformation will be key to impact and sustainability

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, charities and nonprofits have been required to adapt and innovate at a pace never before seen. Organizations rapidly turned to digital solutions in efforts to deliver even more impactful programs, engage donors and supporters and provide opportunities for volunteers. We envision that this dramatic adoption of digital solutions will continue at breakneck speed and also recognize that this will be a significant challenge for many organizations. With chronic underinvestment in both technology and people, many organizations are playing 'catch up'.



The pandemic has caused a profound disruption of community

Physical gatherings of communities of faith, the arts, sport and recreation, in addition to many others have been profoundly disrupted by the pandemic. Whether and when these groups will again gather remains to be seen, but physical distancing, masking requirements, and vaccine passports all promise significant change into the foreseeable future. Some positives, such as technology-enabled gatherings and a resurgence of outdoor events, have occurred but many community-centered organizations have been indelibly and dramatically altered.



A moment of presence and visibility

One consequence of many of these changes has been a once-in-a-generation moment where charities and nonprofits were seen, collectively, as the critical binders of our social fabric that they are. While most businesses simply closed or struggled to operate, charities and nonprofits, wherever humanly possible, stayed open and often increased the services they delivered to those in need. An opportunity exists to capitalize on this sudden moment of visibility.

A post-pandemic operating reality may look very different

When writing the 2016 SPF, we didn't envision the disruption that would be caused by the onset of the pandemic. Every organization in the sector has been profoundly affected. Some have closed. Others have temporarily suspended aspects of their work. Fortunately, most have continued to adapt and operate. We believe that many aspects of the disruption are likely to be long-term - some negative and some positive. From examining hybrid models of operating to greater intentionality related to the well-being of employees and becoming best-in-class employers, sector organizations will be required to continually adapt and change.

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to strengthen Canadian charities and nonprofits so they can better serve individuals and communities both here and around the world.

OUR VISION

Our vision is of a stronger Canada where charities and nonprofits work together alongside business and government to build vibrant and prosperous communities.

OUR COMMITMENT TO EQUITY, ANTI-RACISM AND ANTI-OPPRESSION

Imagine Canada envisions a charitable and nonprofit sector that supports and cultivates diverse, inclusive, just and equitable communities. We are working towards a sector that is truly representative of the communities we work with, that provides radically inclusive workplaces to employees and volunteers of all backgrounds, and that advances systems change.

Racism and oppression are primary obstacles to the fulfillment of organizational missions across the sector. Black, Indigenous, and racialized people, the disability community, and the 2SLGBTQ+ community among many others have been deeply impacted by these systems of oppression. Truly vibrant and healthy communities - where all are supported in living freely and fully - are only possible if the sector takes a leadership role in addressing inequitable systems with an intersectional lens.

Canada's charitable and nonprofit sector has its roots in systems of colonization and white supremacy that have and continue to do harm to individuals both employed and served by organizations. These systems threaten to undermine the hard work being done by charities and nonprofits every day.

Imagine Canada is committed to embedding anti-racism and anti-oppression into our human resources, management, governance, programs, and daily practice. Our work will be strengthened by a broad range of skills, perspectives and experiences, and this will be reflected in the diversity of our board, staff, partners, and the communities with whom we engage.

We acknowledge that there are voices that have not been previously centered or reflected in our work. Going forward, we will intentionally strive to identify, consider, and challenge the ways in which inequity and oppression are present in the charitable and nonprofit sector. With bold humility, we commit to continual learning, relationship-building and informed action.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

1 INFLUENCE OUR ENVIRONMENT

Game Changing Outcome: A Canada...

where government considers the contributions and needs of charities, nonprofits and social enterprises when public policy, funding programs, legislation and regulation are being developed and implemented.

Charities and nonprofits can either be enabled or constrained by the conditions of the operating environment. Current sector regulatory, legislative and policy structures are either ignored or not adapting quickly enough to respond to changes within society and the sector, and are therefore preventing organizations from realizing their full potential. The COVID-19 pandemic, anti-racism movement and increase in awareness for reconciliation actions has cast a spotlight on the disconnect between the need for change and the constraints of the current system.

Influence our Environment embodies the idea that government and the sector share a common interest: the betterment of communities. It proposes that immediate attention and continual evolution of the environment governing charities, nonprofits and social entrepreneurs is essential for the federal government, the private sector, the nonprofit sector and ultimately, people. It speaks to the need for the sector to present evidence-based approaches that enable lawmakers and legislators to provide their support.

As organizations in this sector continue to innovate and adapt to better serve the needs of their communities, so too must the funding, legislative and regulatory environment. We are committed to the continuing evolution of the environment in which 'good' takes place. By working in a truly collaborative and networked way, we can mobilize the collective strength of the sector to influence decisions that are made.



STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

2 ENSURE OUR RELEVANCE

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where government, business, media, and sector organizations use timely, relevant sector data, information, and knowledge when taking action.

It is difficult for organizational leaders to spend time, money and energy on examining macro issues. In fact, many don't see that as their role, but one that is ideally suited to an organization like Imagine Canada. At the same time, there is a thirst for knowledge about the changes that are taking place in society. Leaders have expressed the desire to be well-informed so that choices facing their organizations are made in a way that provides the best possible chance for success.

The need for organizational leaders to have access to relevant, timely, and actionable information remains an imperative especially in the context of the rapidly changing times in which we live. Ensure Our Relevance embodies the idea of connectedness to changes in society - population changes, demographic shifts, trends in volunteerism and giving, etc. We are committed to continuing to play a key role in supporting charities, nonprofits and others contributing to social good through the provision of data and information that is as accessible and easy to use as possible. In addition to a sector audience, Ensure Our Relevance seeks to ensure that government decision makers, corporate Canada and members of the media have access to accurate information about our sector.

We will continue our journey to become a data-driven organization – ensuring that we have systems and talent to produce and interpret data. We will work in collaboration with others in the sector to create an equitable, sustainable and connected sector policy-research ecosystem. We will seek to balance the need for long-term studies with the need for regular releases of information, and will factor in the needs of small, medium and large organizations. We will also participate with others in research efforts that may be best delivered through meaningful collaborations.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

3 ELEVATE OUR EXCELLENCE

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where charities and nonprofits are operating at the highest levels of governance and deliver the highest quality programs.

At the core of the relationship between charities, donors and volunteers is trust. This spans program delivery, stewardship of donated funds, and organizational governance.

Elevate Our Excellence embodies the belief that there is a profound need to demonstrate operational excellence to Canadians. The Standards Program, stewarded and operated by Imagine Canada, can be the leading vehicle for showcasing excellence in governance, accountability, and transparency. The Standards program can also be leveraged to become a vehicle for sector dialogue and leadership around best practices and how the sector should and can adapt to changes in the environment - diversity, sustainability, talent shifts, digital transformation. It has always been intended that the Standards program would be more than a trustmark and brand. At its core has been the desire to positively affect the operations of organizations. The Standards Program in conjunction with partners will adapt to support the post pandemic operational challenges and the new operating reality facing nonprofit organizations.

Imagine Canada also recognizes that in the Standards Program, organizations only 'succeed' if they attain full accreditation. There are no other milestones available along the journey. And yet, ongoing improvement and organizational excellence are not absolutes. They are a series of intentional actions aimed at making the organization as good as it possibly can be. We are committed to create opportunities for improvement that build over time to full accreditation or simply recognize this is as far as organizations have come at a point in time.

We will foster trust as more Canadians experience the impact of accredited charities by witnessing and experiencing the quality of well-governed, professionally managed organizations.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

4 ENERGIZE OUR VOICES

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where the unique and diverse perspectives, lived experiences and expertise of the plurality of nonprofit sector voices are strategically, intentionally and regularly communicated to the general public, media and government.

Organizations in our sector operate in a marketing, communications and knowledge mobilization environment that is chaotic and challenging. Often, emergent issues headline the news and frame the perception of sector organizations as a whole. For years, stories about 'cost of administration' dominated. In recent times, political activities, the Covid-19 pandemic, WE Charity and anti-racism have shaped the viewpoints of Canadians.

Recent events have made more visible a long-standing divide within the sector: between relatively well-resourced organizations that address traditional needs evident from their position of privilege, and those less privileged, often operating within and for the benefit of equity-seeking communities, but without the benefit of the capacity, contacts, and profile with media and government that the privileged few have. The vastly different experiences of organizations during the pandemic have exacerbated inequitable resourcing challenges.

Energize our Voices recognizes that, to be a credible pan-sector leader, Imagine Canada must consciously, and conscientiously, work toward a more inclusive sector, where diverse and often unheard voices can influence, and be influenced, as peers. Energize our Voices also embodies the idea that the sector can embrace a multiplicity of voices and identify opportunities where cohesive approaches can significantly improve our shared interests.

We commit to a networked way of working, one that actively seeks out other perspectives, voices, and experiences to mutually influence us and one another for the greater benefit and cohesion of all. We also commit to leveraging our place in the sector to work collaboratively with others to proactively and reactively participate in public debate and dialogue on issues of importance to Canadians and the sector.



We would like to thank the following organizations for kindly allowing us to use their pictures:

- Calgary Food Bank
- Dress for Success Orillia and Barrie
- Habitat for Humanity Niagara
- The Raw Carrot
- Youth Centres of Calgary



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